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Delegate Heather A. Bagnall moves to exonerate Maryland's 17th- and 18th-century accused witches

At first glance, Delegate Heather A. Bagnall's (D-Anne Arundel) bill HJ0002 that seeks to exonerate the Maryland women (and one man) who were accused or tried for witchcraft centuries ago might seem to pale against today's pressing legislative issues.

That is, until you hear their stories. The Maryland Witches Exoneration Project has collected their names and what is known of their lives. The Maryland Women's Heritage Center supports Delegate Bagnall's bill and will preserve the stories of these innocent individuals.

Belief in witchcraft arrived in America with colonists from the Old World

Between 1654 - 1712, there are recorded instances of women (and one man) accused and tried for witchcraft, mostly in what is now southern Maryland. Women with special knowledge, such as midwifery or horticulture, were viewed with suspicion. So were poor, eccentric, mentally ill and even "outspoken" women.

When life's unfortunate events occurred around them – bad weather, neighborly feuds, illness or unnatural deaths – blame sometimes landed squarely on these women who never quite fit into the norm. Their lives were upended with



This illustration by Howard Pyle depicts the arrest of a suspected witch. [New York Public Library Digital Collections](https://www.nypl.org/digital/collections/newyorkpubliclibrary).

hysterical accusations of witchcraft fueled by ancient superstitions and beliefs carried across the ocean from the European Old World.

Their tales are heartbreaking. Yet, today, in a time when conspiracy and misogyny still persist, the stories also ring achingly familiar.

[Here is what we know of their stories . . .](#)

Join the MWHC in conversation

Allyship: Unveiling Commonalities

We invite women from all cultures and backgrounds to participate in a collaborative conversation to create allyship and partnership.

Join us for an interactive online event where we will explore the power of allyship and uncover the commonalities that connect us all. Through engaging discussions you will learn how to be a better ally and create a more inclusive community. Don't miss out on this opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and make a difference.

Sat, January 25, 2025 11-1pm ET on ZOOM
Register on EventBrite <http://bit.ly/3ZYU7am>
This is a FREE event.



Reenactment of Rebecca Fowler's trial.
Medium, **The Only Executed Witch in Maryland**, Women of Essex, June 24, 2024

Did you know: The Connecticut General Assembly passed a similar resolution that exonerated accused witches in 2023. Massachusetts has also made legislative attempts to clear names of those accused during the Salem Witch Trials.



Donations and sponsorships support newsletters like this as well as Maryland Women's Heritage Center's ongoing programs and events.

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